DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 055 SO 031 323

AUTHOR Shields, James J.
TITLE Sacred Architecture, Historic Religious Traditions and Education in Japan.
PUB DATE 1999-07-00
NOTE 13p.; Revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Comparative and International Education Society (Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 14-18, 1999).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Architecture; Buddhism; Comparative Education; Confucianism; *Cultural Context; *Educational Change; Folk Culture; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Religious Factors; *Social Change; Social Science Research
IDENTIFIERS *Japan; Shintoism; Spiritual Values

ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the relationship between society and education within the framework of sacred architectural sites, as well as through the more customary vehicle of sacred texts and practices. In particular, the study of sacred architectural sites is a unique and powerful research tool for studying spiritual and cultural meaning and its relationship to social and educational change, as it provides readily available visual and physical narratives for the processes of inner transformation and transcendental thinking. Japan is used as a case study to highlight the role religious traditions play in the development and the design of educational and social reform strategies in diverse cultural traditions. This study required the exploration of Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian traditions as they relate to current social and educational values, practices, and challenges. (Contains 38 notes.) (Author/BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 439 055

COMPARATIVE AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SOCIETY

Annual Conference 1999

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
The University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario

SACRED ARCHITECTURE, HISTORIC RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS AND EDUCATION IN JAPAN*

James J. Shields
Center for Educational Outreach and Innovation
Box 132
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, NY 10027

Friday, April 16, 1999
1:30 -- 3:00 p.m.

SO 031 323

James J. Shields

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

*Revised July 1999

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

The relationship between society and education and religion will be analyzed within the framework of sacred architectural sites, as well as through the more customary vehicle of sacred texts and practices. In particular, the study of sacred architectural sites is a unique and powerful research tool for studying spiritual and cultural meaning and its relationship to social and educational change, as it provides readily available visual and physical narratives for the processes of inner transformation and transcendental thinking. Japan is used as a case study to highlight the role religious traditions play in the development and the design of educational and social reform strategies in diverse cultural traditions. Specifically, for Japan this study required the exploration of Shinto, Buddhist and Confucian traditions as they relate to current social and educational values, practices and challenges.

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

Purpose of Inquiry 4

Family and Community in Religious Practice in Japan 5

Dynamic Intersection of Culture and Religion 8

Ecological Approach to the Study of Education 12

Practice of Religious Values in Japanese Schools 14

Shinto: "The Way of the *Kami*" 18

The Religious Practice of *Genze Riyaku* 20

Sacred Architecture, Religious Belief and School Achievement 22

Cultural Diversity and Universality in Sacred Architecture:

The Hero's Journey 25

Notes 27

Introduction

Prosperous, vital and responsible societies do not come into being by accident. They are created by individuals through social institutions dynamically rooted in a common ground of sustaining traditions and beliefs. Of all the processes which determine the degree to which individuals and cultures achieve a good life, none is more important than the care given to children and to the education of all people throughout their lives.

Considerable effort has been expended by scholars and policy makers throughout the world to find educational systems which appear to be successful as possible transferable models of educational theory and practice. In this pursuit, Japan has attracted considerable attention. Japan has an exceptionally high-percent of appropriate age groups not only enrolled, but in daily attendance at every level of schooling. In terms of academic achievement, Japanese students excel in every measured international standard up to the age of 17 and have achieved a high school graduation rate of 95 percent.

While Japan has attained unquestioned success in academic achievement, there are other areas that are viewed as problematic and in need of reform, especially around such issues as individual freedom and creativity. As the Central Council on Educational Reform, an advisory body to the Japanese Prime Minister, stated, "A general diagnosis must be made of a grave social illness now affecting our educational system..." Among the problems the Council identified are:

1. excessive competition for university entrance examinations;
2. problem behavior and lack of discipline among pupils;
3. uniform and inflexible structures and methods of schooling;
4. a general lack of "zest" and vitality for living in children.[1]

Over the last fifteen years the Central Council on Education in Japan has put forth a series of recommendations for structural and procedural change in schools to meet the problems they have identified. Among the more recent recommendations are:

1. Reduction of the school week from six days to five;
2. Interaction of the junior and senior high school into one six year secondary system, a 6-6 instead of a 6-3-3 system;
3. Replacement of the written entrance examination for senior high schools with lotteries, interviews and references;
4. Giving universities more power to create new faculties, curricula and programs;
5. Lowering the age requirement for admission to universities;
6. Expansion of unconventional education with more emphasis on volunteerism, international studies, information technology and classes for slow learners.[2]

These recommendations, however, raise as many questions as they attempt to answer. Past experience in educational reform has taught us that unless reform initiatives are linked in a meaningful way to a society's historic cultural foundations, they are very likely to fail. To succeed recommendations for institutional, structural, and procedural reform must be accompanied by strategies which emphasize the inner transformation and empowerment of individuals, as well as external, institutional changes such as those found in the recommendations of the Central Council of Education in Japan.

This paper is developed on the foundational principle that planning for social and educational change in Japan and elsewhere around the world holds limited possibilities for success unless: (1) it is anchored in a deep understanding of a broad array of historic cultural traditions, especially those connected to spiritual values; and (2) it includes an emphasis on inner transformation and empowerment of individuals. Primarily, cultural traditions are viewed as the dynamic in which the present is constructed out of the past and in which future ideas and behavior are already developing.

Robert Thurman in *Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Real Happiness* powerfully outlines the process required to attain understanding of the inner world of cultural traditions and how it relates to social and educational change. We need to explore, he says, the nightmares and the dreams of a better world our cultural ancestors had and the strategies they devised for fulfilling their dreams. In this search, Thurman urges us to delve into the archetypal plain of a culture's collective unconscious where the mythic patterns of its belief systems and behaviors of enlightenment reside.[3]

Thurman challenges us to turn the full force of our inner intelligence to limiting the enormous power given in today's world to the outer universe of matter, capital, energy, goods and services and the view of people as simply products and consumers. His diagnosis is that we have made our deities, capitalism, collectivism, militarism, bureaucracy, science and technology and have made our demons, selfism, materialism and tribalism. As a result, he says, we have allowed ourselves, "...to become wild savages on the surface of the outer world."[4]

If we wish to achieve a good life and a better world, Thurman argues, we need to move deeply into our inner consciousness and to study the enlightenment imagination of historic religious teachers. Until that happens, he predicts, the social reform agendas of government bureaucracies and utopian thinking will have only limited success.

The challenge Thurman presents is not an easy one. As David Landes, professor of history and economics at Harvard, argues in *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, if we have learned anything from history, it is that such important inner transformative values as tenacity, hard work, patience, honesty, thrift, and trust make a difference in determining whether or not a society attains a good and prosperous life. Unfortunately, Landes laments, we still have not

reached the point where we know how to cultivate the ability within all individuals which is required to nurture these values and to renew our social institutions.[5]

Purpose of Inquiry

The purpose of this inquiry is to explore the ways spiritual traditions have influenced social and educational thought and organization. The relationship between society, education, and religion will be analyzed within the framework of sacred architectural sites, as well as through the more customary vehicle of religious texts and practices. In particular, the study of sacred architectural sites provides unique and powerful research tools for studying spiritual meaning and social change, as it provides visual and physical reality to the processes of transcendental thinking and inner transformation.

Throughout this study questions will be pursued on how different religious conceptions of the mind, the body, knowledge, life and death create different conceptions of social and educational values and practice. Using Japanese education as a case study, the role religious traditions play in the cross-cultural study of society and in the design of reform strategies appropriate for diverse cultural traditions is highlighted.

Robert N. Bellah's landmark work, *Tokugawa Religion: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan*, provides an excellent baseline for exploring the perennial questions related to religious traditions and education. Bellah draws heavily on Max Weber's views that cultural values usually reflect spiritual traditions and that they shape individual lives and institutions such as schools in profound and pervasive ways, even after the historic religions upon which they are based no longer seem to be especially vibrant or relevant in contemporary life.[6]

The social function of spiritual traditions, as Bellah and Weber define it, is to supply a larger framework for the central values of society and to help individuals endure their daily frustrations related to death, suffering, and loss. Eventually, these meanings become validated in each culture's sacred architectural sites and texts.

Bellah believes that the past history of religion can be observed in the present-day thoughts, feelings and aspirations of individuals. As such they provide us with contemporary sources for identifying the way historic spiritual traditions dynamically shape and influence lives over time. By way of example, Bellah discusses Mencius, the great third century B.C. Chinese Confucian, who continued to be an important force in eighteenth century Japan, even though he had lived centuries before in a different culture.

Both Bellah's and Weber's research is rooted in the assumption that for a culture to be fully understood, it is necessary to probe into its deepest historic religious traditions and to trace its influence on contemporary social institutions and norms. As Bellah's work demonstrates, the study of historic world religions offers a valuable way to illuminate the resources within all cultures for revitalizing itself, and for resolving contemporary social, educational, economic and political challenges. In many ways Bellah's views can be succinctly summarized in a statement Huston Smith has often used in his lectures, "Trying to understand the human story without religion would be like trying to explain smoke without fire."[7]

Family and Community in Religious Practice in Japan

Some scholars question whether religious traditions play a significant role in contemporary education and society or, for that matter, in any aspect in the everyday lives of people in Japan. This view is understandable as Japanese religious sentiment is as difficult for

the Japanese themselves to explain as it is for Westerners. Considerable hyperbole and disagreement surround much of the discussion of Japanese religion. While some observers regard the Japanese as totally lacking in spirituality, others claim that the Japanese are filled with religious fervor. An important contributing factor to this uncertainty is the difficulty of looking at Japanese spirituality from a Western perspective which largely defines religion in terms of clearly articulated, sectarian religious affiliation and church attendance.

When asked about their religious life, most Japanese tend to respond that they are not religiously inclined. In a recent poll in response to the question, *Do you go to church or not...would you say you are religious?*, only 21 percent of the Japanese answered yes, compared to 82 percent of Americans who answered yes. In response to the question, *Were you brought up religiously at home?*, only 22 percent of the Japanese answered yes, compared to 82 percent of Americans who answered yes.[8]

A close look at religious practice in Japan, however, reveals a different picture than these polling results convey. Statistics reported in *Shukyo* (Religion Annual), a publication of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, on the status of legally registered religious groups indicate that the total number of members in all groups in Japan was in excess of 200 million and that membership in Shinto organizations numbers over 100 million and just under 100 million in Buddhist organizations. Since the population of Japan is only about 124 million, this means that many people in Japan claim affiliation with more than one religion.[9]

The reality is that even after massive urbanization and the formation of nuclear families in the post-World War II period, the Japanese continue to seek the services of Buddhist temples when their parents die and to pay New Year visits to a nearby temple or shrine to pray for health,

wealth and educational success. In fact, the number of such visits is on the increase at the most famous shrines. According to media reports, nearly 90 million people made New Year visits to temples and shrines in 1996.[10]

In actuality, many of the Japanese who disavow any personal adherence to a "faith" are members of a Buddhist family denomination and they have Buddhist rites performed for deceased family members. As Robert J. Smith, prominent anthropologist of Japanese religion, writes in *The Living and the Dead in Japanese Popular Religion*, "the concept of the *ie* (household) as a model of family relations passed from generation to generation by those who are born into a family, its eternality manifest in the cult of ancestors, continues to be the conceptual norm."[11]

In a Buddhist Soto Zen sect survey, for instance, Smith found that 77.8 percent of parishioners reported that they went to their temple for funeral and memorial services. When asked whether or not they ever visited graves of family members (*o-hara-mairi*) an astonishing 90 percent replied they did at *o-bon* and at the two equinoxes (*o-higan*). In addition, a significantly large number also report that they perform rites at home altars of feeding ancestral spirits daily and make special offerings to them on the anniversaries of their deaths and on certain specified days. In contrast, while increasing numbers of Americans are attracted to Buddhism, many of whom practice Japanese Buddhist meditative sitting (*zazen*), only 15 percent of the Japanese respondents reported that they had ever practiced *zazen*, which many Buddhist clergy believe is the foundation upon which all doctrinal instruction should be based.

Another form of group religious practice, in addition to the family-centered activities which Smith described, occurs on the community level. As Michihito Tsushima reports in

The Japanese and Religion, each community has Shinto shrines dedicated to *ujigami* or *ubusunagami*, tutelary deities, who are thought to have protected the community since ancient times. Religious festivals are held annually in conjunction with these shrines to express appreciation to the deities and the desire for community prosperity, order and survival in the future. The communal work of preparing and participating in these Shinto festivals, Tsushima reports, serves to reinforce community solidarity and other shared Shinto spiritual traditions as well as secular values.[12]

Increasingly many scholars of Japanese culture are expressing deep concern about the narrow research focus over the last twenty years on political, economic and organizational relations to the neglect of deeper values which operate in the everyday lives of people. As Smith has written, if spiritual values are mentioned at all the tone is dismissive. The assumption seems to have been that economic affluence in post-war Japan has brought about spiritual emptiness. Yet as we have seen in the work of Smith and other scholars, there is a great deal of evidence that demonstrates that the mundane and the sacred worlds are deeply connected in Japan.[13]

Dynamic Intersection of Culture and Religion

Spiritual traditions provide belief systems which function to make cultural value systems meaningful, define role expectations and help people to deal with life's persistent and ultimate frustrations. These belief systems tend to be encapsulated in metaphors expressed in sacred architecture and in elaborate narratives, core stories, and texts which are used to verify and explain cultural value systems. They also provide models for understanding life, for guiding behavior and for giving concrete reality to transcendental thinking. The widespread use of metaphor and narrative in physical structures, in oral traditions and in written form, historically

and across cultures, suggests that humans are inherently drawn to metaphorical as well as to more mathematical and rationalistic forms of thinking.

A compelling example of a core sacred metaphor is the *Net of Indra* described in the writings of Tu Shu (557-640), Chinese philosopher and founding teacher of the Flower Garland school of Buddhism.[14] Tu Shu describes the celestial jewel *Net of Indra* or *Kinisha* as being made entirely of clear jewels all of which reflect one another's image. Each jewel multiplies indefinitely and these reflections are all in each jewel. When one jewel is dotted there are dots on all jewels. Tu Shu uses the metaphor to explain how he believes knowledge and behavior are constructed out of experience. Fundamentally, he believes, nothing is ever rejected and everything is conjoined in one way or another through multiplication and remultiplication in every aspect of life.

While Tu Shu applies the metaphor to all things to help us think about life in a different way, he cautions, "life is not entirely this way." The *Net of Indra* demonstrates the dynamics of human experience only up to a point. Metaphors are only partially true. He also tells us that because the construction of knowledge and behavior is such a layered process, it is virtually impossible to fully unravel all its aspects. Tu Shu explains that although everything interconnects, it is difficult to trace beginnings and to answer all questions completely.

These insights help us to understand that while we can ascribe specific foundational dates to specific religious groups and place them within relatively brief time periods and geographic places, the reality of their actual histories is much more oblique and complex. Every spiritual tradition, including those of major importance in Japan, Shinto, Buddhism and Confucianism, was in formation within earlier traditions long before the era of its recognized historical

founders, and each has dynamically absorbed important elements from other traditions and events in the ensuing years after its founding.

Although each has a unique tradition, extensive borrowing has taken place among Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The practical ethics of both Shinto and Buddhism, for example, have Confucian origins, just as Confucianism in turn has been influenced by Buddhism and Taoism. In his book, *Shinto-Buddhist Syncretism*, Yoshie Akio points out that the assimilation of Shinto with Buddhism, a merging of a native indigenous belief system with a world religion, took place without either losing its respective identity, and with each remaining open to the other.[15]

By way of historical example, Akio describes the transformation of many Shinto shrines into Buddhist temples in the eighth and ninth centuries. This took place within the context of a number of movements including the growth of Kubai's school of esoteric Buddhism, the rise of the cult of malevolent spirits of the dead (*omyro*), and the combination of the Shinto concept of defilement with the Buddhist faith in pure land.

As Thomas Cleary points out, all spiritual traditions are heirs of many sources of ancient knowledge, much of which is lost to us today, which came together in dramatically compelling ways often in times of extraordinary political and social change and unrest. By way of example he cites some of the ancient sources of Taoism including: shamans who knew how to alter consciousness; healers who studied the properties of plants and minerals; and diviners who studied weather, stars, animals and the environment as a whole.[16]

The way the past influences the construction of great systems of spiritual thought is also exemplified in the work of Confucius, one of the great figures in the history of human

understanding and a pioneering educator. The *Analects* based on Confucian teachings is one of the most influential books in history. With the expanding influence of the Chinese empire throughout East Asia, Confucian teachings on the cultivation of public and private conscience through education, enmeshing webs of social obligation and the importance of unifying cultural ideals permeated many of the civilizations China encountered. Yet Confucius did not consider himself the sole source of what he taught, but rather the heir and transmitter of ancient learning going back nearly two thousand years before his own time.[17]

Every culture is energized by ideas pulled together in pivotal periods which eventually come to be defined as turning points in their histories. One such period took place approximately 2,500 years ago in the Greco-Roman Period in the West, in China, in Persia, and in India which at the time was the richest economy in the world. Often it is only in retrospect that we are able to identify a period as pivotal based on the recognition that it was a period of amazingly fertile educational activity surrounding the founding of major spiritual traditions which continue to exert tremendous influence today.

During this period, Confucius and the purported author of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tsu, were more or less contemporaries with Buddha in India, Zoroaster in Persia and Pythagoras in Greece. The societies in the different parts of the world where these teachers lived were in disarray. Obviously, what each had to say about how to restore peace in the midst of so much chaos and uncertainty struck a responsive chord in the hearts and minds of vast numbers of people then, as it continues to do so today.

As Thomas Cahill, author of *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe*, noted,

> "We should view history from the moments of great cultural gifts. We should know where we came from as that is how we know who we are right now. We can not get away from these dynamic moments. They form the values of our contemporary life."[18]

This short glimpse of history provides a sense of how apt the metaphor of the *Net of Indra* is in giving us a way to visualize the process by which spiritual traditions are dynamically reflected and multiplied in the construction of everyday lives and social institutions.

Also, the *Net of Indra* is a metaphor for elucidating what scholars have come to define as the dominant Japanese worldview. A fairly representative statement of this worldview can be found in a paper presented by Ito Shuntaro at the 1994 European Association of Japanese Studies conference in which he defines the basic concepts that underlie Japanese thought as: (1) non-substantiality or process orientation; (2) the world as self-becoming or non-transcendalism; and (3) each-otherness or relationalism. Clearly, the reflecting jewels in the *Net of Indra* provide a good metaphor for each of the aspects in the meaning of Japanese culture found in Shuntaro's definition: process, non-transcendalism and relationalism.[19]

Finally, the *Net of Indra* gives us a strong image to support the cultivation of optimism about the potential impact each individual can have on the world. To live in the world is to be constantly changing the world and to being changed by the world. As Robert Thurman has so eloquently stated, "The world is neither best or worse; it is what individuals make of it. A world of individuals is the intersubjective collective mindfield of all these individuals."[20]

Ecological Approach to the Study of Education

The study of the role of world religions in the construction of social and educational thought, practice and organization necessarily rests on the assumption that the definition of

education has to be broader than simply schooling and has to include other institutions with educational functions and their relationships to each another and the larger society.

In the 1970s, Lawrence A. Cremin championed this approach in his book *Public Schooling* and labeled it "an ecological approach."[21] In many ways, Cremin's ecological approach to the study of education is similar to the concept underlying the metaphor of the *Net of Indra*. Each holds that behavior, individually and institutionally, is constructed out of experience and is conjoined in one way or another in everyday life.

A more recent use of the ecological approach can be found in Thomas Rohlen's and Gerald Le Tendre's *Teaching and Learning in Japan* which includes contributed chapters on training in a Zen monastery, a bank, the theater, and in private supplementary tutoring schools, as well as in preschool and elementary and middle schools.[22]

The contributors to *Teaching and Learning in Japan* make clear that education in Japan is multi-institutional, interconnected, and a life-long process characterized by both diversity, discontinuities and by contradictions, as well as by similarities and complementarities. Excellent examples are provided of how learning is pursued in an array of sectors inside and outside of public schools, in the family, religious organizations, the arts, and private tutoring academies. Clearly, in Japan as elsewhere around the world, neither individuals nor cultures limit their intentional learning ambitions to schools alone. Truly, "An entire village educates a child."

In terms of the interconnectedness of public schooling to other social institutions, Nancy Urai Russell's chapter in *Teaching and Learning in Japan* on the private sector Kumon Institute is very insightful. The Kumon Institute is Japan's largest private tutoring enterprise which

approximately 70 percent of Japanese elementary school children attend twice a week to study mathematics, Japanese and English.

Whereas Japan's public elementary schools stress group work, problem solving and a discovery approach, the Kumon schools stress individual-centered, memorization and rote learning. Functionally, Kumon Institutes provide the indispensable, supplementary academic groundwork in basic skills required to enable Japanese students to attain high levels of academic achievement which Japanese parents feel is not adequately available to their children in public school classrooms.

Kumon Institutes provide a dramatic example of how fee-paying parents and the private corporate sector join public schooling to achieve high levels of national educational standards. It is an "ecological educational approach" worth studying by those involved in the standards and privatization debates on educational policy in the United States and elsewhere, as it offers a successful model of an alternative way in which the private and public sectors can interconnect to improve teaching and learning across the curriculum.

Practice of Religious Values in Japanese Schools

A most obvious and direct place to start an analysis of the intersection of religious traditions and education is the study of the way schools deliberately attempt to develop social, civic, and moral values among students. In Japan this kind of education which is largely derived from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto is identified as *seishin*. Its dominant characteristics are: (1) the precedence given to character development over academic development in pedagogy; (2) the stress upon the role of the teacher as a moral guide; and (3) the practice of *hansei* which can be defined as critical pupil self-reflection focused on such social norms as

cooperation, doing one's best, valuing hard work, empathy and effort.

Le Tendre and Fukusawa describe how middle school students, for example, are required to practice *hansei* by keeping diaries in which they discuss the amount of time given to studying, leisure activities, home life as well as explore their problems generally.[23] Homeroom teachers read these diaries on a regular basis and return them with comments. These diaries are seen as essential tools for teachers to build emotional ties with students, as well as for moral training in perfectionism which stresses doing one's best at all times against all odds, regardless of role status. The practice of *hansei* confirms that social consciousness in human beings is not taken as a given in Japan. Rather, practices such as student diaries demonstrate that a good deal of time and intense energy is given by Japanese teachers and others to assure a tight social order in schools and in society and to the development of moral consciousness in students.

Hansei is also practiced on the elementary school level. Catherine Lewis reports in *Educating Hearts and Minds* that based on extensive research over a number of years she found that Japanese elementary pupils engage in critical reflection on a daily basis with each other individually and with a whole class and with their teachers. Self and whole class reflection is regarded as a vital ingredient in empowering school children to play an effective role in classroom management, school discipline, the shaping of school norms, and academic learning.[24]

During exercises in critical reflection related to classroom discipline, elementary teachers endeavor to transform individual misbehavior into a problem for whole class reflection. In the process, teacher authority tends to be muted and peers are deeply involved. Generally, understanding not compliance is the goal and every effort is made to protect a "good child" identity for those who misbehave.[25]

Along with these similarities in areas such as the practice of *hansei*, there are enormous differences between the lower and the upper levels of Japanese schooling. In fact, the differences are so great that many outside observers find it difficult to understand how the two levels can possibly function together as part of the same system.

In terms of the differences, elementary schools place greater emphasis on problem solving and discovery methods and the nurturing of positive social skills than middle schools do. Elementary school classrooms encourage: long periods of free play, individualistic curiosity, boisterous spontaneity, strong emotional relationships ("hearts that touch") among pupils and the teacher, and the frequent use of small heterogeneous groups.

In contrast, middle schools typically are dominated by lecture and note taking classrooms which emphasize direct teacher imposition of academic knowledge and skills, rote learning, memorization, and intense discipline leading toward examinations for hierarchically ranked schools and universities.

Side by side with the dominant lecture and note taking classrooms in middle schools, there are student clubs, committees and counseling activities which are organized to socialize students to endure intense hardships and to provide them with the opportunity to act out distinctions in seniority and differentially assumed responsibility.

As Thomas Rohlen points out, the creation of "instructive hardship" is the foundation of the teaching process in Japanese middle schools and is viewed as a form of spiritual training, *sheishin kyoiku*. Within this philosophy, student character is judged on the basis of the ability to endure pain, coolness in the face of threat, patience, dependability, persistence, self reliance and intense personal motivation.[26]

Confusion, pain, loneliness and many other sources of disequilibrium are valued as critical pedagogical tools in middle schools. At each grade level in secondary schools, more and more demanding hardships are required from adolescents to assure that they will experience a successful developmental passage from childhood to adulthood. Adolescents are expected to persist, to struggle, and not to give up. Within this context, the dominant motif of exam preparation and the increasing severity of teachers are defined as necessary and positive aspects of growing up, and are regarded as a good means for allowing the basic good character within all students to unfold.

The abrupt change from the playful pedagogy of early schooling to the more demanding challenges of middle schools is seen by some scholars as paralleling in many ways the historical shift from the generally playful characteristics of Shinto to the more formalistic elements in Buddhism. Even today, Shinto rituals are about *asobi*, play and entertainment for the gods, and *akakui*, concepts reflected in the attitudes teachers and parents stress as important for young children including, spontaneity, energy and natural curiosity. However, as Tom Hare points out in "Try, Try Again: Training in Noh Drama," the pedagogical foundations of Japanese education is not rooted in Shinto alone, as it can also be traced to the work of Confucian sage, Mencius and to Buddhist concepts of original enlightenment.[27]

Zeami Motokuji's fifteenth century classic guide for Noh training contains helpful clues for understanding the Buddhist foundations of the sharp shift from playful to arduous rote learning and imitation when students move from elementary to middle schools. Zeami argues that the onset of puberty makes necessary the introduction of a disciplined process of hard work to recapture the unself-conscious, spontaneous and original beauty, *yugen*, of the prepubescent

child. Even though this kind of adolescent training might appear to run counter to individual impulse, it is considered necessary for helping adolescents to reunite with their original Buddha, "good" natures.

From past to present, the foundational orthodoxy of Japanese Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism can be traced to contemporary educational philosophy as it relates to what is defined as an appropriate teaching pedagogy for children and for adolescents. In particular, Zeami's guide on Noh training for adolescents helps us better understand the historical religious roots of the importance in Japanese middle schools on the mastery of basics, *kihon moto*, the belief that form and techniques are more important than the intellectual grasp of a subject or an art form; and why imitation has become a core teaching tool in Japanese education.

Shinto: "The Way of the *Kami*"

The word Shinto or "way of the *kami* (spirits)" comes from the Chinese, *shentao*, which means mystic ruler of nature. Shinto embraces nature and sees potential essence in everyone and everything including mountains, stones, trees, wind, foxes and people, all of which have been appropriated to represent local *kami* in Japanese communities.

Early Shinto sacred sites were simple, forest clearings marked by bamboo poles set in the ground on which strips of linen or paper were tied and purified by priests to prepare for the reception of *kami*. This led eventually to enclosing walls and erecting sacred architecture to establish a site where spirits and humans could interact in portentous ways.[28]

This process is very similar to the understanding of how sacred sites evolved elsewhere around the world. J. Pitman McGehee, in *Looking for God's House*, links the earliest roots of sacred sites and ritual in the West to the process of *temenos* which is related to healing in

spiritual traditions. In this process a circle is drawn and the inside of the circle is defined as sacred where healing, incubation and change can occur. The purpose of the space, McGehee says, is to point to a mystery which is available and can be experienced. The persistence of this tradition is reflected in the familiar New Testament promise often inscribed over the entrances to Christian churches, "When two or three gather in my name, I am there."[29]

Even though Shinto historically precedes Buddhism, the formal organization of Shinto architecture is similar to that of early Buddhist temples. Typically, Shinto shrines are characterized by axial paths which create a series of thresholds and spaces which become increasingly sacred until they reach the end of the path where there is a place reserved for the *kami* and priests who attend them.

The central foundational beliefs of Shinto emphasize fertility, regeneration, the transitory character of life, and the constancy of the forces of nature. Water is ascribed strong symbolic content, notably as expressed in rites of purification by the washing of hands and rinsing the mouth at water troughs located at the thresholds of all Shinto shrines. In this regard, the periodic rebuilding of *Isei Jinju*, one of the most important Shinto sites in Japan, powerfully symbolizes both the importance of rites of purification, and the sense of the impermanence of human life and effort found in Shinto architecture and cosmology.

Another important belief is the need to bind communities together to pray for *kami* in festivals, shrine ceremonies, and individual prayer practices for support and protection. There is a strong tradition of belief that if certain Shinto rituals of supplication are performed faithfully, especially at sacred sites, then the requests will be granted. In this sense, the axial path at each Shinto shrine symbolizes confidence in prayerful rituals and intent.

In the sections that follow there will be a discussion of the Shinto practice of the supplication for practical benefits, *genze riyaku*, and the way it has become an important part of the ecology of schooling and education. As such, it provides an excellent example of the intersection of sacred architecture, education and historic religious traditions in everyday life in Japan.

The Religious Practice of *Genze Riyaku*

There is a vast network of Shinto shrines and temples dedicated to helping individuals seek spiritual support to obtain prosperity, good health, a harmonious marriage, freedom from addictions, and success in university examinations. This religiosity reflects the desires of individuals to access their fullest potential with the help of superior powers through ritualistic practice at special Shinto architectural sites.

Ian Reader and George Tanabe in "*Genze Riyaku*: The Common Religion of Benefits in Japan" describe the way in which Shinto shrines attract large followings of people regardless of religious affiliation or previous behavior who seek worldly benefits related to health, wealth, success and love. *Genze riyaku* is a well-entrenched normative system which articulates with the values of traditional, as well as modern Japan. As such, it affirms both secular and spiritual values of individual morality and social responsibility. In fact, Reader and Tanabe point out that *genze riyaku* is so important in Japanese culture, its absence in Protestant Christianity is probably the reason why it has failed to attract more converts in Japan.[30]

In a recent issue of the US edition of *Asahi Evening News*, Mary King discusses the way *genze riyaku* works in contemporary Japan. The author highlights two Shinto shrines in

Okayama Prefecture, a region connected to some of Japan's early history where shrine ritual and festivals related to health, gender identity, critical life passages and luck proliferate.[31]

One of the shrines, *Karube*, dates back to the fourteenth century and is referred to locally as *Chichigami-soma jinji* (breast goddess, giver of free-flowing milk and guardian of motherhood shrine). Rather than the usual rabbits, dogs, dragons and other animals of the Chinese Zodiac, the walls of the shrine are covered with a hundred or so breasts in various sizes made from paper-mache and cloth accompanied by prayers for such concerns as giving birth to a healthy child, having enough milk for a newborn, a safe pregnancy and the strength and willingness to be a dedicated mother. Mainly, the petitioners are pregnant women who are in poor health, have trouble adjusting to motherhood, or have friends or relatives who they feel could benefit from prayers to *kami*.

Karube is not Japan's most revered or architecturally significant shrine and may be its only one dedicated to the breast goddess. However, it serves as a good illustration of the important role Shinto shrines play all over Japan in strengthening psychological and cultural identity and commitment to community roles and responsibilities.

In terms of male bonding and identity, one of Okayama's oldest festivals, the *Saidaiji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri* (naked festival) serves to affirm passage from boyhood to manhood, male concepts of virility and as a dramatic vehicle for the release of pent-up physical and emotional energy.

A reported 45,000 people attended the February 1999 *Saidaiji Eyo Hadaka Matsuri* to watch 9,000 men clad in *fudoshi* (loin cloths) stampede through the streets surrounding *Kannon-in* temple in Okayama City and finally push and shove into the enormous open hallway of the

temple. The central challenge of the festival is for one individual to catch the *shinji*, a baton, which is dropped from the temple window at midnight. The *shinji* is thought to bestow good fortune on the individual who catches it. The person who catches it is given the title of "the lucky man of the city" which he holds until the next festival.

Most mainstream scholars of Japanese religion focus on sacred statues, texts, and the writing of early scholars and mystics, and such historical practices as pilgrimages and wandering monks. These scholars tend to dismiss the study of the pursuit of this-worldly, practical benefits through religious rituals and festivals as marginal, folk belief, magic and superstition. Orthodox, doctrinal Buddhists, in particular, tend to dismiss *genze riyaku* as a folk-tainted practice which deviates from the true path by encouraging desire and acquisitive sensibilities.

These contrarian views are important for the insights they provide into the full spectrum of religious belief in Japan. However, they in no way undermine the relevance of *genze riyaku* as a source for studying the way historical religious traditions interconnect with contemporary life in Japan. In fact, understanding the significance of shrine worship and festivals is an important way to gain an appreciation of Japan's culture and the people at its deepest cultural level.

Sacred Architecture, Religious Belief and School Achievement

The tremendous anxiety surrounding entrance examinations in Japan has generated a broad range of rituals at sacred architectural sites. One Shinto sect devoted to examinations, *Temmangu* (heaven-filling), for example, has 12,000 monasteries, and the *Yushima* shrine, located near Tokyo University, attracts 700,000 to 800,000 students and their family members annually between January and March when examinations are given.[32]

Deities and the narratives surrounding their histories typically personify values most admired in a society. The founder of the *Temmangu* sect who lived between 845 and 903 continues to be venerated today as a deity of entrance examinations was a Confucian who performed Shinto and Buddhist rituals. His veneration grew out of his efforts to create a fair and effective examination system, including limiting its length and establishing fairer standards of grading. As in the past, his portrait continues to hang above the podium at Tokyo University at its annual matriculation ceremony.

The intensity of both examination anxiety and the religious fervor it generates is dramatically manifested, as Kangmin Zeng informs us, in the "one hundred times homage," *ohya-kudo-mairi*, which aims to win homage from a deity through self inflicted torment. To perform *ohya-kudo-mairi* students or their parents climb stone steps to the shrine, ring a bell to announce their visit to the deity and then pray, repeating the entire process one hundred times. Despite the physical discomfort involved, large numbers of students and parents engage in the practice yearly.

A number of religious objects have been developed around *genze riyaku*. One widely used object is called an *ema*, a small tablet usually made of cypress wood, on which believers write their petitions. The largest number of *emas* purchased in Japan today are related to scholastic achievement, especially on university entrance examinations.

The purchase of objects and the engagement in rituals to secure practical benefits in this life is not just an expenditure of economic resources, but involves a personal moral commitment. As Reader and Tanabe note, a student buying an *ema* for academic success is not merely

exchanging money for an amulet for good grades, but is making an intense commitment to invest time and effort, as many students write on the back of their *ema*, "to study hard."[33]

The prayers for examination success are not merely an attempt by students to pass responsibility on to the deities. The examinations require the memorization of extensive amounts of knowledge which demands considerable time, concentration and sacrifice to acquire. The text of most *emas* contain requests for the stoic self-control and forbearance to resist temptations for personal gratification and a commitment to devote themselves entirely to study.

As a research tool, the text written on the *ema* offers great possibilities for gaining an insight into honest sentiments, conflicts and the worldview of students. Prayers written on *ema* are not meant for publication and are not subject to censorship. As Zeng points out, "Their frankness, *honne*, in contrast to public speech adjusted to fit social norms, *tatemae*, is a very valuable feature.[34]

These examples demonstrate the importance of *genze riyaku*, the pursuit of practical benefits in the here and now at sacred architectural sites, and the mutual interdependence of two major institutions, religious and educational in Japan. The use of *ema* and the practice of *ohya-kudo-mairi* represent but two examples of how Japanese schooling and religious institutions intersect to form an ecological system which functions to encourage intense study and extraordinarily high levels of academic achievement with the support of a vast system of private tutoring schools and a rigorous national governmental university entrance examination system.

In fact, as Zeng points out, even though the sanctifying of the meritocratic examination system goes back to before the Meiji era, the universalization of schooling since the Second

World War has expanded the role traditional religious values and sacred sites play in supporting Japanese educational goals and practices to an even more extensive scale than in the past.[35]

Cultural Diversity and Universality in Sacred Architecture: The Hero's Journey

The Shinto practice of *ohya-kudo-mairi*, "one hundred times homage," and the purchase of shrine *emas*, which contain requests for stoic self-control and the strength to commit totally to studying for examinations, reflect a recurring, cross-cultural theme in all cultures, the *hero's journey*, a phenomenon described by Joseph Campbell as a rite of passage for youth and ultimately the quest for spiritual transformation and attainment.[36]

A major theme in the concept of the *hero's journey* is trial and redemption, not only of the individuals participating, but of the deities and spirits important in the pantheon of the spiritual tradition involved. Elements of trial and redemption are clearly reflected in the practice of *ohya-kudo-mairi* and the use of *ema* which are conjoined functionally to help Japanese students to resist temptations for personal gratification and to realize high levels of academic achievement and acceptance into an elite university.

Thomas Barrie in *Sacred Paths, Sacred Place* goes one step further than Joseph Campbell and connects the concept of the *hero's journey* to the way in which sacred architecture creates a microcosm where a spiritual journey or pilgrimage is symbolized or reenacted. The *hero's journey*, Barrie says, is expressed in a sequence of paths and places with choices along the way which serve to accentuate distance and time of travel. Also, components of preparation, separation and return are incorporated in a way which establishes a discernible relationship between architectural form and the symbolic spiritual meaning of the sacred journey.[37]

The concept of the *hero's journey* and its corollary concept of trial and redemption is not unique to Japan. It has analogs in sacred texts, rituals and architecture across cultures and history. In Christianity's primary text, the New Testament, we find, "I am the way, and the truth and the life..." and "...the gate is narrow, the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few," as well as in the narrative of the events of the trials of Jesus at Calvary which were endured on the way to crucifixion and ultimately resurrection.

The Biblical Old Testament also contains numerous examples, as in the narrative of Jonah who descends into the belly of the whale and emerges transformed. In the Koran, we have, "Do you think that you shall enter the Garden of Bliss without such trials as come to those who have come before you." In Buddhism, there is the story of Buddha's four journeys that transformed his life starting with his leaving his family and his princely position, traveling on his journey, facing trials and finally achieving the enlightened state.

Joseph Campbell describes the process compellingly in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. He writes:

> "The one who enters the temple compound and proceeds to the sanctuary is imitating the deeds of the original hero. It is a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred. The path to be experienced as a trial, physically or psychologically. The promise is often contradictory, being simultaneously easy and hard, clear and obscured and distant and close."[38]

Notes

1. James J. Shields, Jr., "New Challenges for Higher Education in Japan in the 1990s" in Peter Cookson, Alan Sadovnik and Susan Semel, eds., International Handbook of Educational Reform (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992): 321-343.

2. James J. Shields, Jr., ed., Japanese Schooling: Patterns of Socialization, Equality and Political Control (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Press, 1993); "Nurturing Individuality, Education Council Airs Reform Plan," The Japan Times (May 31, 1997): 2 and "International Co-operation in Education and Movements in Japanese Educational Reform," NIER Newsletter (Japan) 29:1 (November 1997): 4.

3. Robert Thurman, Inner Revolution: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Real Happiness (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998).

4. Ibid.

5. David E. Landes, The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998).

6. Robert N. Bellah, Tokugawa Japan: The Cultural Roots of Modern Japan (New York: The Free Press, 1985). Reissued paperback edition. Also see: Max Weber, The Religion of China (New York: The Free Press, 1951).

7. Pam Vaughan, "Film Review of Confucianism — The Wisdom of Faith Series," Education About Asia 3 (Fall 1998): 87-88.

8. "Japan and America, Religious Beliefs and Practices," Roper Center Review of Public Opinion and Polling 6:5 (1995): 30.

9. Michihito Tsushima, "The Japanese and Religion," The Japan Foundation Newsletter 13:5 (February 1995): 1-5.

10. Ibid.

11. Robert J. Smith, "The Living and the Dead in Japanese Popular Religion." Paper prepared for the Columbia University, East Asian Institute, Modern Japan Seminar, May 8, 1992. 25 pp. Manuscript.

12. Michihito Tsushima, op cit.

13. Robert J. Smith, op. cit.

14. Stephen Mitchell, ed., The Enlightened Mind: An Anthology of Sacred Prose (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991): 41-44.

15. Yoshie Akio, *Shimbutsu shugo* (Shinto Buddhist Syncretism) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996).

16. The Essential Tao. Translated by Thomas Cleary. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991): 123-130.

17. The Essential Confucius: The Heart of Confucius' Teaching in Authentic I Ching Order. Translated by Thomas Cleary. (New York and San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992): 1-11.

18. Thomas Cahill, How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1995).

19. Ito Shuntaro, "Universality in Japanese Thought," The Japanese Foundation Newsletter 2:6 (March 1994): 7-8, 16.

20. Robert Thurman, op. cit.

21. Lawrence A. Cremin, Public Education (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976).

22. Thomas Rohlen and Gerald Le Tendre, eds., Teaching and Learning in Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

23. Gerald K. Le Tendre, "Shido, the Concept of Guidance" and Rebecca Irwin Fukusawa, "The Path to Adulthood According to Japanese Middle Schools" in Teaching and Learning in Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 275-322.

24. Catherine C. Lewis, Educating Hearts and Minds: Reflection on Japanese Preschool and Elementary Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

25. Ibid.

26. Thomas Rohlen, "Building Character" in Teaching and Learning in Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 50-74.

27. Tom Hare, "Try, Try Again: Training in Noh Drama" in Teaching and Learning in Japan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 50-74.

28. Many of the ideas on Shinto architecture in this section are drawn from Thomas Barrie. Spiritual Path, Sacred Place: Myth, Ritual and Meaning in Architecture (Boston: Shambhala, 1996): 79-84.

29. J. Pitman McGehee and Paula J. Webb, "Looking for God's House," Cite (The Architectural and Design Review of Houston) 43 (Winter 1999): 12.

30. Ian Reader and George Tanabe, "*Genze Riyaku*: The Common Religion of Benefits in Japan." Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Japanese Religions held at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies. Honolulu, April 13, 1996. Manuscript.

31. Mary King, "*Kami* and the Art of Staying Virile," Asahi Evening News (US Edition) (March 21, 1999): 3, 5.

32. Kangmin Zeng, "Prayer, Luck and Spiritual Strength: The Desecularization of Entrance Examination Systems in East Asia," Comparative Education Review 40 (August 1996): 264-278.

33. Ian Reader and George Tanabe, op. cit.

34. Kangmin Zeng, op. cit.

35. Ibid.

36. Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949).

37. Thomas Barrie, op. cit.

38. Joseph Campbell, op. cit.